ジョーカー

14

伊藤 悠

Itoh Yu

BIG SPIRITS COMICS SPECIAL

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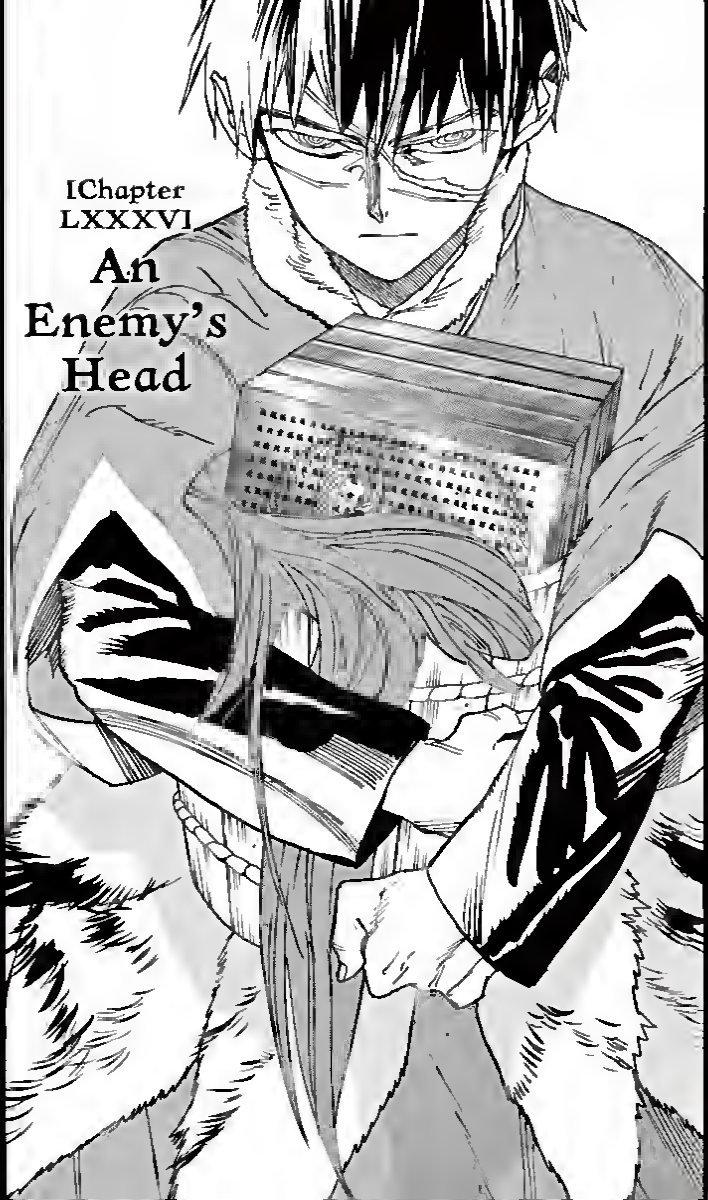
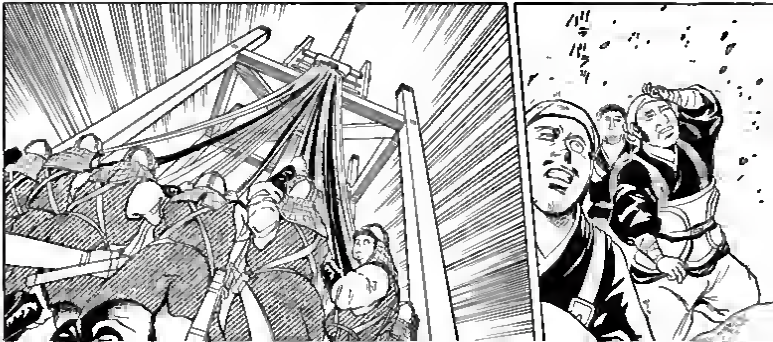
*The cover and inside flap read "writing" in Tangut script.



Chapter LXXXVI

An Enemy's Head


バラバラ

The food!
Leave it.
Hurry and get away from the bank.

シュトヘル

伊藤悠

14

BIG SPIRITS COMICS SPECIAL

Go to next page

Go to next page

Shut Hell.
Fall back to the trees.
Wait.
We can't just leave them.
Get up!
Weshan! Shaji!

You have the means.
Live and remember them all, Gaji.
Enough.
Just end it.
I... I don't want to have to see any more of this.

Shut Hell!
Crush
Say you don't want to die.

He can't say anything like that!
Stop!
Resignation may be strange to you, but this is absurd.
Say it, or I make you die in agony.

cough
hack
I know.
I've given up
a lot of times,
and I always
regretted it.

The whole meaning of his and my lives and deaths is riding on you staying alive.
I'm going to make you live even if it kills you, Gaji.

I bet you gave him your hair as a parting gift.
...You let that boy leave?

Shut
Hell is
dead.
You'll no
longer be
pursued as
a bandit
You
and I will
never see
each other
again
You'll flee
from here
and raise
these letters
of ours
Raise
people
who read
and write
them
Treasure
them. Pro-
tect their
memories,
their
hearts.
Protect
the people
you taught
writing

Gaji said he'll become a writing teacher
He's a good man. People will flock to him anywhere.
A lot of people will follow in his footsteps
Keep going as long as you live, wherever you are.
Until they have children and grandchildren.
12
I'll make a place for writing to live on the other side
Even if we part,
Keep making people who will never tire of writing
More than anyone can ever burn
our hearts ...
Our hearts alone will...

As long as neither of us ever stops,
the Tangut script will be able to take root in the future.

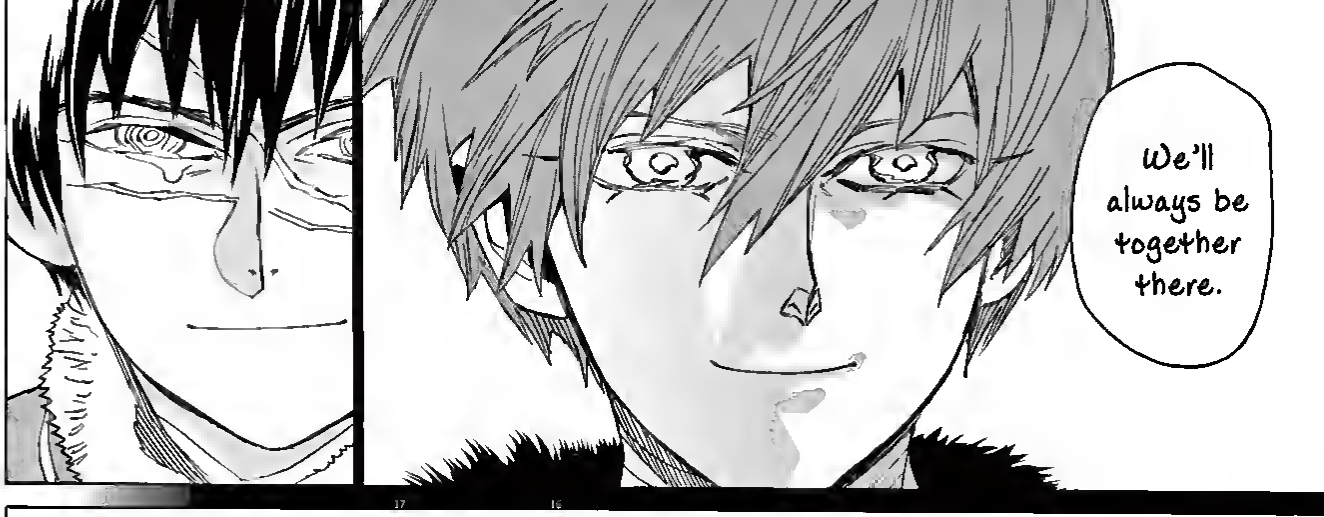
I wrote about all the people I've met
Also, I put what I've written in with the copy of the Voice of Jade.

Sure.

Oh.

Alfald, Ibaha, Nalan
Boldu, Harabal, Jilgus
Sudoh, and Shut Hell.
You didn't write about yourself?
It's not much, but I can't take it where I'm going

I'm going to write about you
About meeting you.
Can I write the sequel?
Se-quel...?
Then, we can meet as many times as we like.


We'll always be together there.

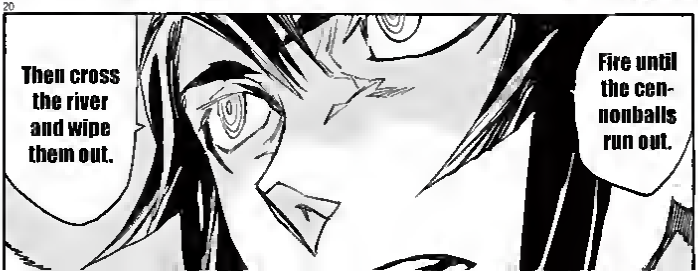
Live with me, Shut Hell.

squish
I'll soak it in salt water and stomp the skin off its face.
splash
squash
splash
I took the head of one of their comrades who died of hunger.
splat
splat
squish
The Voice of Jade gleams faintly... it's beautiful.

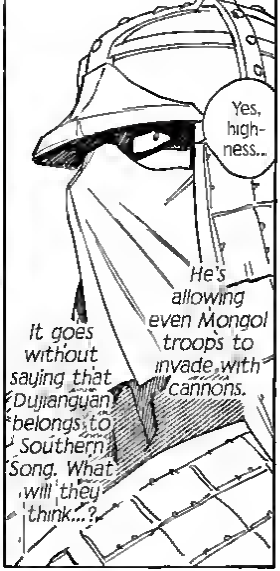
I'll make it a national treasure to the next generation of Mongols.
these letters – and Mother and Boldu's hearts – will outlast Western Xia
The Voice of Jade...
Tolui knows that the full Voice of Jade will be an asset to him.
I won't let them smash it.

Tolui.
ccc

there's no place to run on that island.
Of course, with the bridge gone,
...The bandits have fled into the trees, out of cannon and crossbow range.
Leave no one on the island alive.

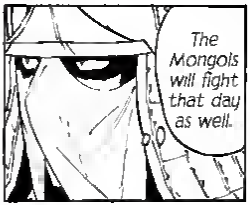

Then cross the river and wipe them out.
Fire until the cannonballs run out.

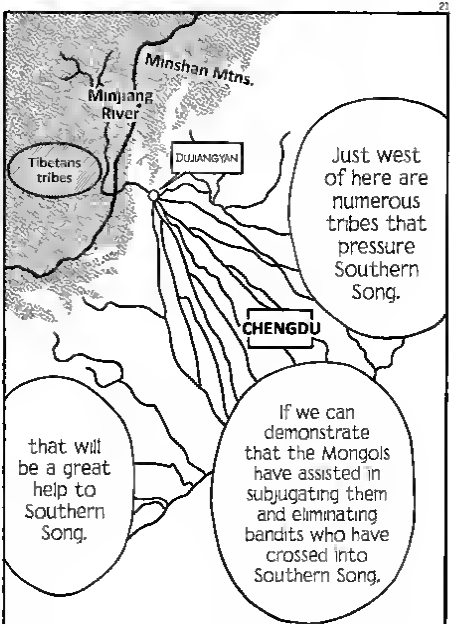
We've earned their gratitude.
Southern Song will not interfere.


Yes, highness..
He's allowing even Mongol troops to invade with cannons.
It goes without saying that Dujiangyan belongs to Southern Song. What will they think...?

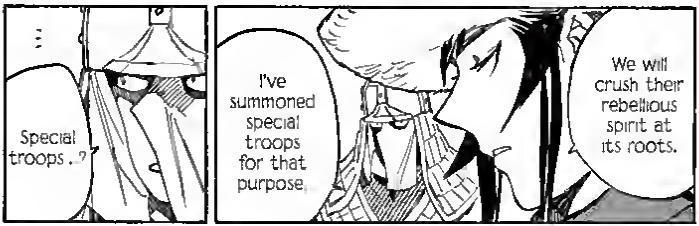
21

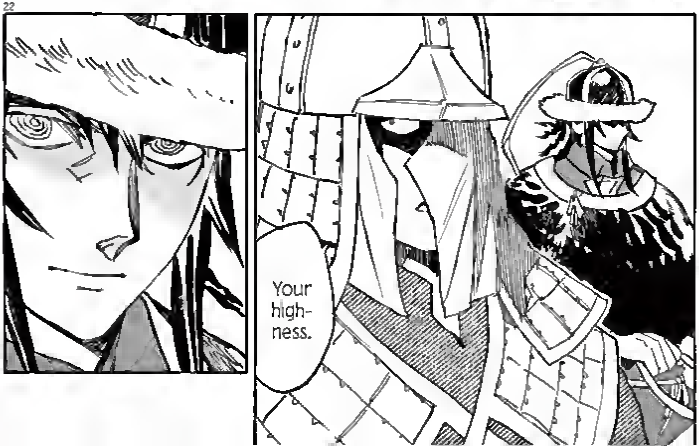
Lord Tolui,
are you looking 10, 20 years ahead?
One day the Mongols will devour Southern Song as well. This is a strategic location! observe it well.


The Mongols will fight that day as well.

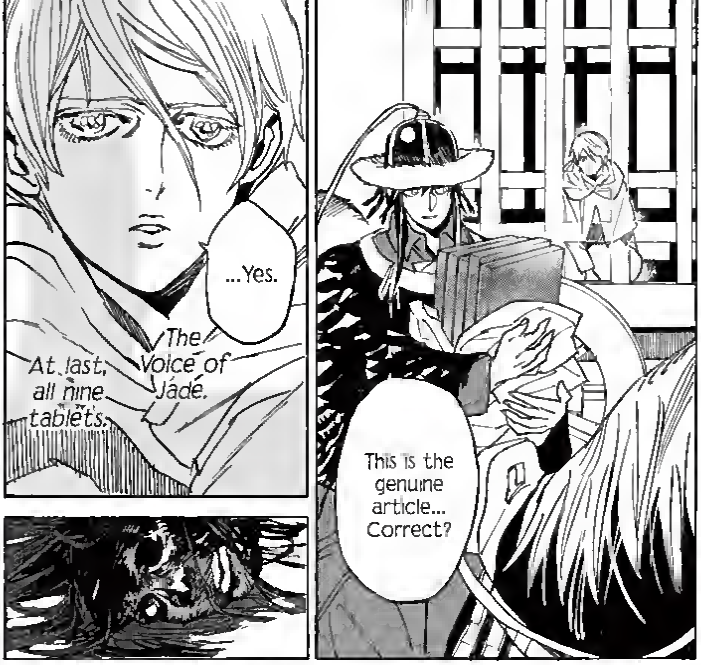

Minshan Mtns.
Minjiang River
Tibetans tribes
DUJIANGYAN
CHENGDU
Just west of here are numerous tribes that pressure Southern Song.
that will be a great help to Southern Song.
If we can demonstrate that the Mongols have assisted in subjugating them and eliminating bandits who have crossed into Southern Song.

In order to show Southern Song that the Mongols have no mercy on their enemies,
gether the heads of every Tangut bandit.


...
Special troops..?
I've summoned special troops for that purpose.
We will crush their rebellious spirit at its roots.


...
Your highness.

...Shut Hell was already killed in infighting between the bandits.
She must have been hated; her body was damaged and burned.
23


...Yes.
The Voice of Jade.
At last, all nine tablets.
This is the genuine article... Correct?

So, you died, Shut Hell. Or was it that girl!?
A miserable end either way...
Come, Yurui.

The bandits are starving. Even if we leave them be, all they can do is wait for death.
Southern Song will dispose of the corpses at the start of the year.*

*DUJIANGYAN WAS REPAIRED ANNUALLY DURING THE SLACK FARMING SEASON BETWEEN WINTER AND SPRING

They begged for their lives, saying that they never wished to defy the Mongols and were merely instigated by Shut Hell.
Why waste more troops and provisions on such a bunch...?

I suppose that's the trick you used to spare the Black Tiger of the Tsog... Melgen Harabal.
Well?

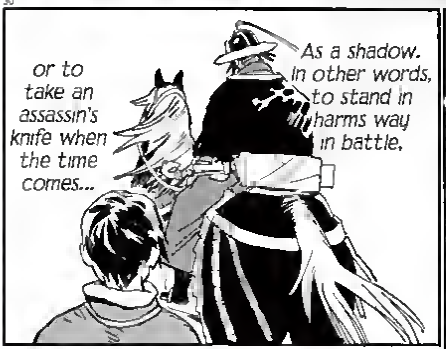
But, my lord...
I saw Yurui gouge out his heart with my own eyes...
He's dead
Well then, Yurui,
if Harabal were alive, how could that be?
Perhaps the Black Tiger had two hearts.
.....

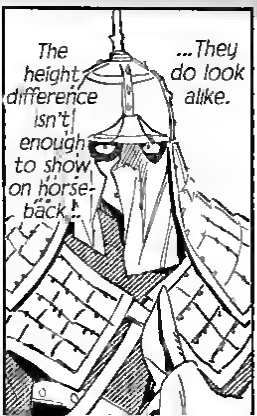
Too soft.
Certainly, he would need two hearts to survive that.
Perhaps I was mistaken.
Ha, hahaha.
Even knowing that that may be your downfall.
So, you're daring in trickery, but can't bring yourself to make tools of the lives of those you've consorted with.
How foolish.
Or am I simply tired of doubting people?
Is it my own softness that makes yours seem pleasing?

Very well.
You did indeed gouge out Harabal's heart to demonstrate your loyalty to the Mongols, and to me.
In which case,
Pax
You would never do something like taking someone else's head, peeling off the face,
wrapping it in Shut Hell's hair, burning it...
and passing it off as Shut Hell's.

If even that Voice of Jade had been a fake—
If you had gone that far to mock me I would have put new air holes all over your body
But today, for the first time, I've taken a liking to you.

I shall accept you at my side, as a shadow in Nalan's place.


As a shadow. In other words, to stand in harms way in battle,
or to take an assassin's knife when the time comes...


...They do look alike.
The height difference isn't enough to show on horse-back..

...Don't shoot recklessly.
Stop it.
For taking me this far.
Thank you.

I have one target.

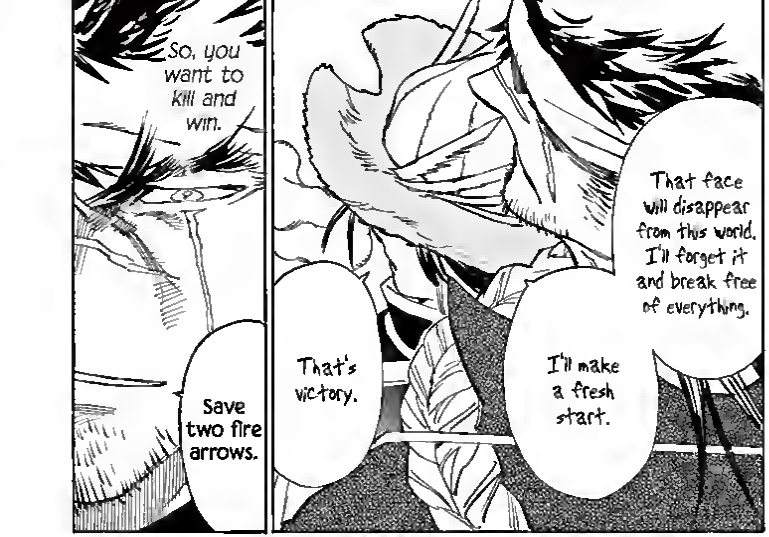
The Mongol crown prince Tolui.

Chapter
LXXXVII
Love and
Hate

Yurui told me
he met ghosts crossing a river in winter.
Lord Natan isn't here.
Huh? Yurui even sees stuff like that?

I'll lose it if I don't forget soon.
It's me who was forgotten.
That man probably wants you to forget him.

and pass away.
..Let the flower of your girlhood bloom
I'll lose to time. I'll be imprisoned...
...The girl's talking nonsense.
To a dead man?


So, you want to kill and win.
That face will disappear from this world. I'll forget it and break free of everything.
Save two fire arrows.
That's victory.
I'll make a fresh start.

But if you fulfill your wish first...
One to break that cage and take the woman and the Voice of Jade.
Go somewhere and disappear.
If you win, the cage doesn't matter.
One to erase that man's face and make your wish come true.

Halt the bombardment.
Resume immediately at sunrise.
Shut Hell is still over there.
Tolui.
You said that there would be no battle once you had the Voice of Jade and the head.
I said that I would not burn Tangut writing,
but I never said that I would not kill Tangut bandits.

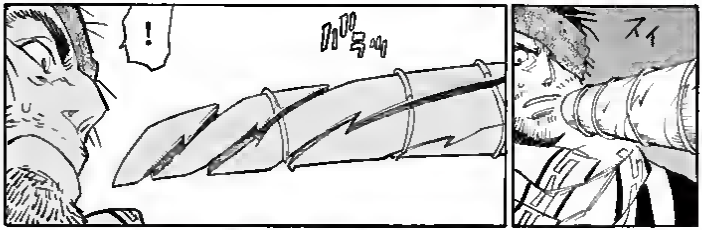
The Tangut script is yours and mine. Power for the New Mongols.
I won't allow people who use it to multiply unregulated out of my sight.
5
From now on, all those who read and write it will be raised under my and Veronika's watchful eyes.
Like children.
Non-sense.
You're telling me to raise a poison to my lord – to the Great Khan...?!

If you would come with my Mongols, watch them subjugate the bandits.
Also...
You must make certain, Yurui.
Check if Shut Hell had two heads.
We cross the river in a few days.

Nnn ngh ...!
Nnn ngh ...!
Shit. The cannons've stopped, but my ears are still ringing.
They kept it up until nightfall...
...We're getting out of here
as soon as we can.
Shut Hell.
but they're just softening us up before they come over and kill us all.
This river doesn't freeze, so I sort of expected them not to cross...
They're merciless.

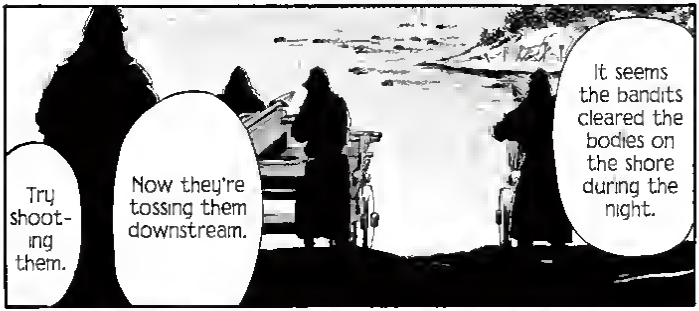
I'll carry you.
It's a scratch. I don't need help
But it's...
a little... hard to talk.
But you haven't stopped bleeding since then.
Stand up, Shut Hell.

You...!


!
ﾊﾞﾝ
ｽｲ

Yeah.
We're not well equipped, but it's better than nothing.
I haven't got time.

ブル
ブル


It seems the bandits cleared the bodies on the shore during the night.
Now they're tossing them downstream.
Try shooting them.

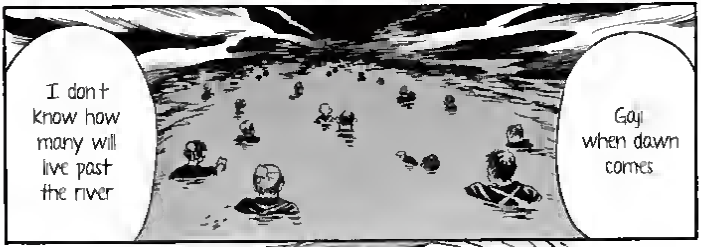
...They're dead.

There are a lot. Did we get that many?
Are you safe, Shut Hell?
Many also perished of starvation.
Make sure. Cantinue the bom-bardment.

They've slowed to a drizzle.
Then ...
Maybe they're running out?
Not many cannonballs coming down today.
The guys who went on ahead will protect us.
It's fine.
Tomorrow. We cross at daybreak.
...It'll be fine.

Remember: if they find us, we're dead.
...Let's go.
Flow with the bodies.
ガバッ
The river's not frozen, but it's still winter.
.. The weak ones won't hold out.
Then we part here. Do your best.
It's a longshot Gaj
But even if I'm not there then
write for yourself
Hey, Shut Hell, I haven't forgotten
When we get to some place safe, I'll, umm, write about you
Give it a rest. I wouldn't know what to write
Without somebody to read it.

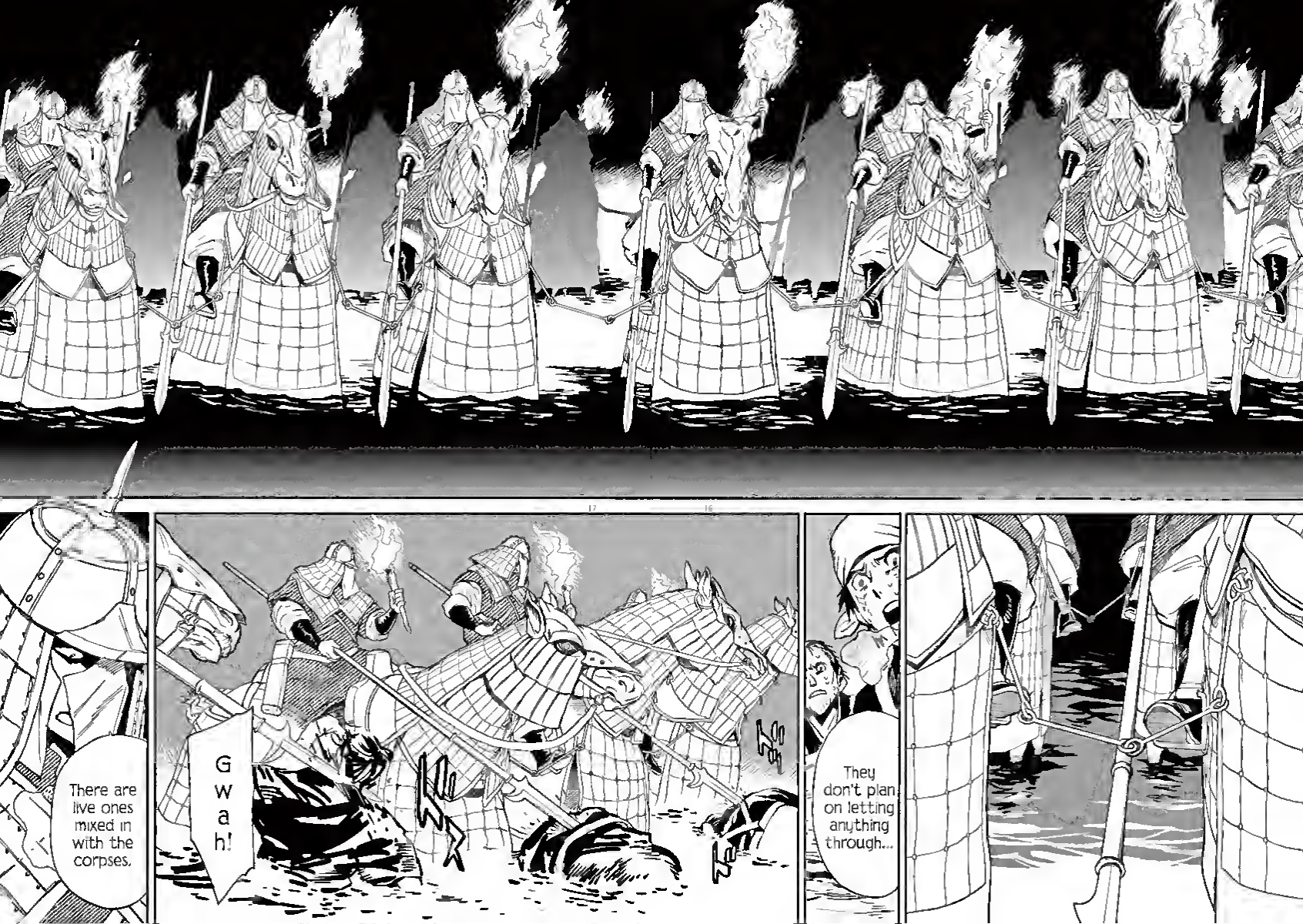
Write "It's all over and we're doing well"
A little while back when I'd lost an eye and was at death's door you...
I guess not

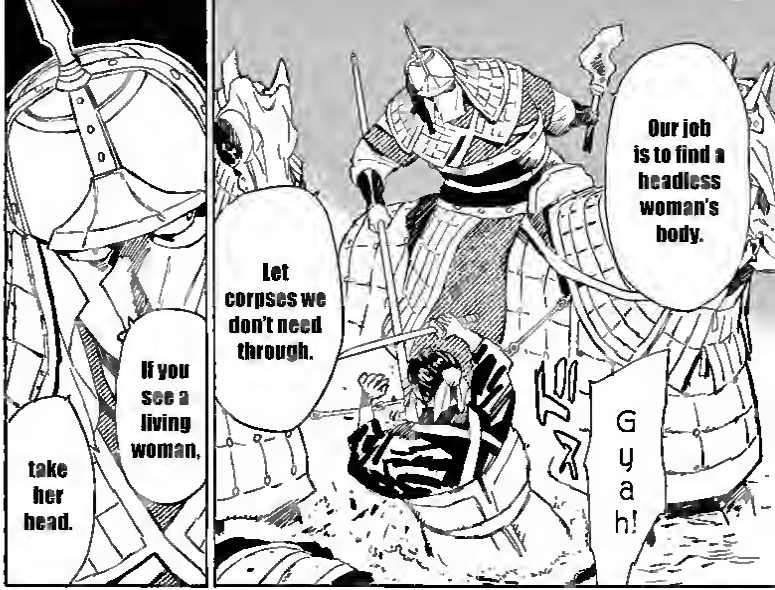

I don't know how many will live past the river
Gaji when dawn comes

Don't stop writing
Force yourself to read
Even if everyone's gone even if you're alone, at least you'll be with you

Gaji!
Shut
Hell...?

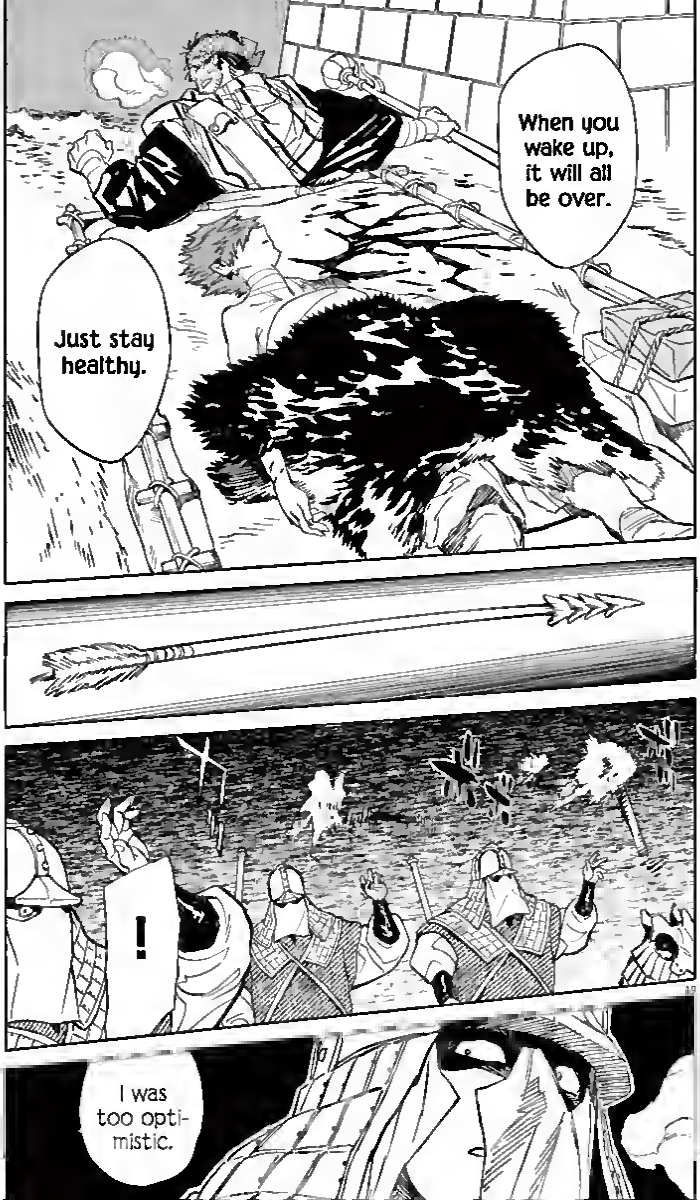
...Bastards
saw
through
us.


There are live ones mixed in with the corpses.
Gwah!
They don't plan on letting anything through...

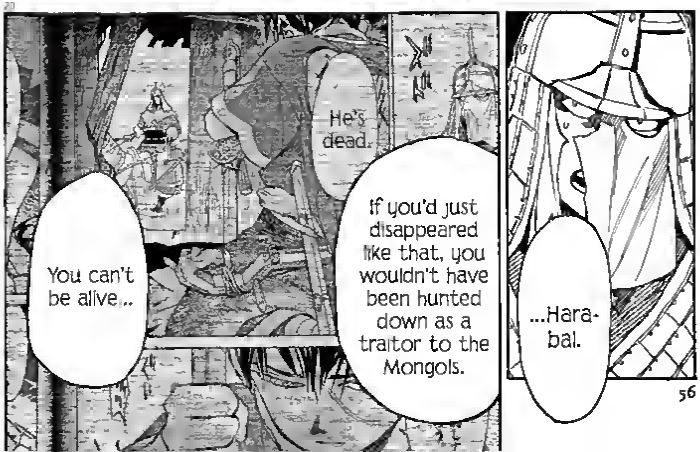

Our job is to find a headless woman's body.
Let corpses we don't need through.
If you see a living woman,
take her head.
Guah!

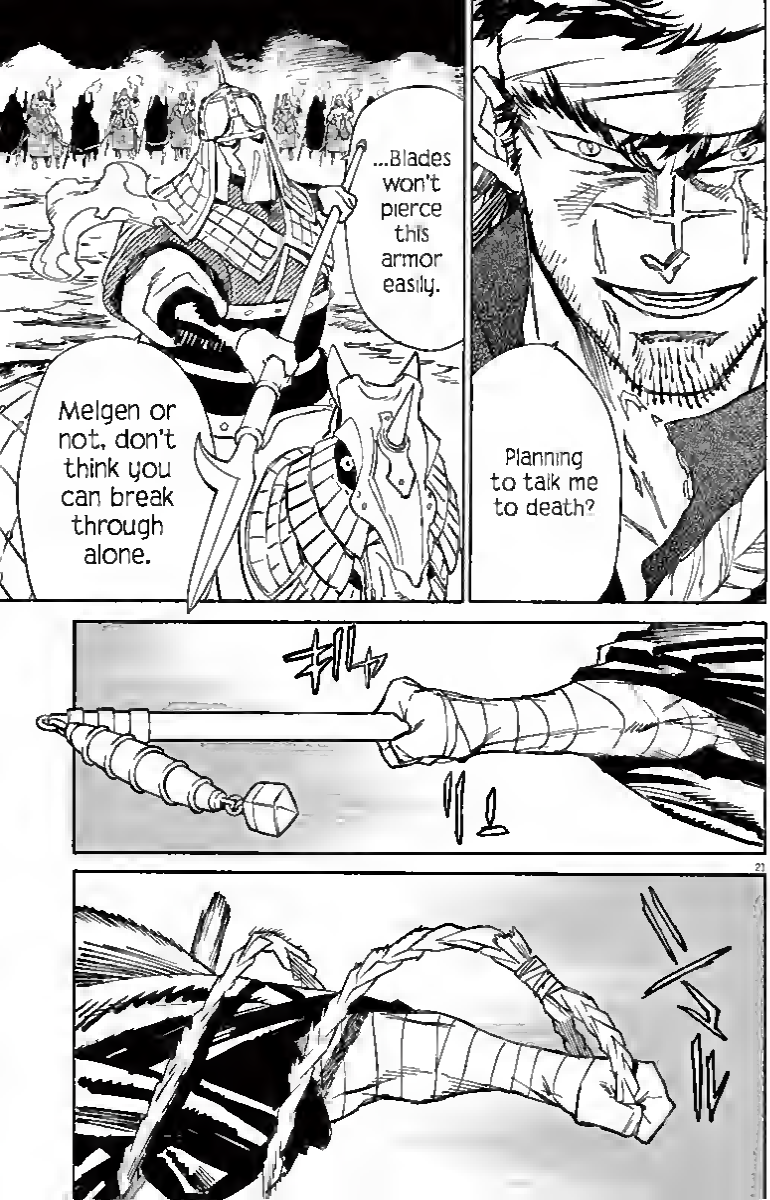
...There's no way out this time.

I can't feel my fingers...
I'll keep you safe.
Take a nap.
We won't last soaking in this cold water.
They're advancing in a solid line...

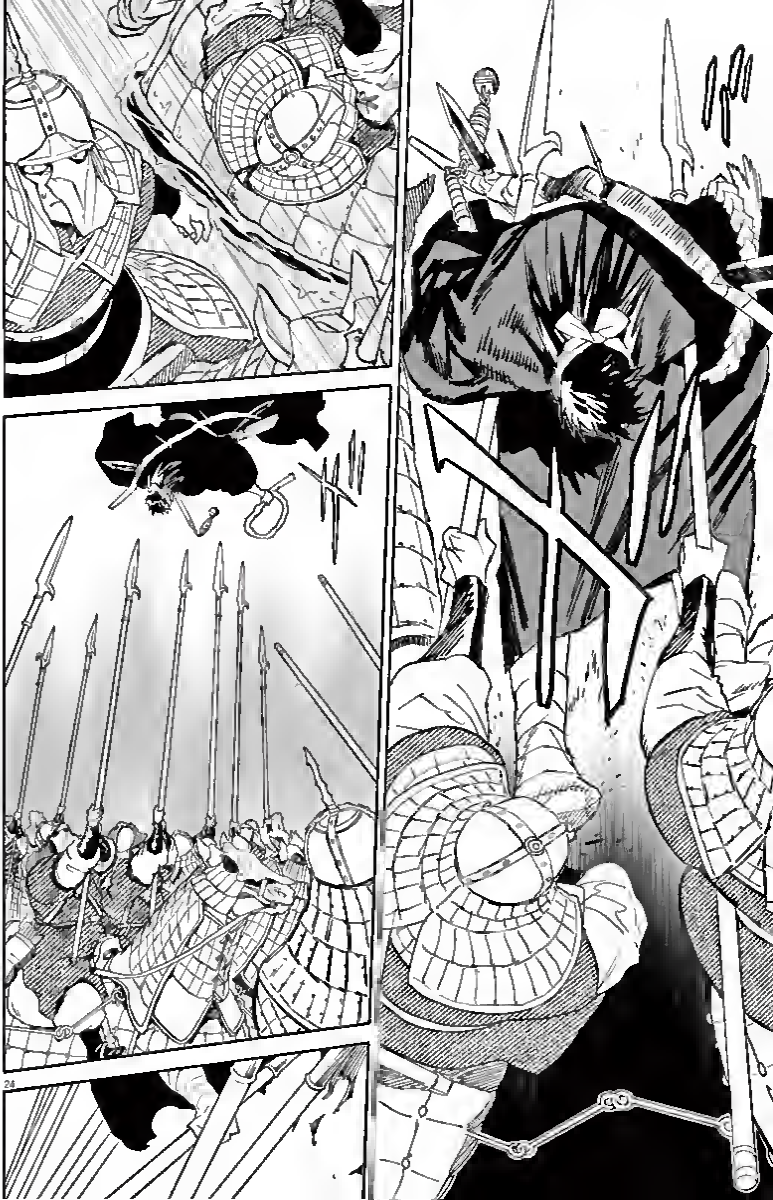

When you wake up, it will all be over.
Just stay healthy.
!
I was too optimistic.

I'd hoped that Tolui would come himself.


He's dead.
If you'd just disappeared like that, you wouldn't have been hunted down as a traitor to the Mongols.
You can't be alive...
...Harabal.


...Blades won't pierce this armor easily.
Melgen or not, don't think you can break through alone.
Planning to talk me to death?

I'm not alone.



ルキュ
カリ
ヨダ!
ニ
ヒュ
カリ

He'll shoot if he manages to put distance between us!

There's some-thing in the wa–
!?
whinney

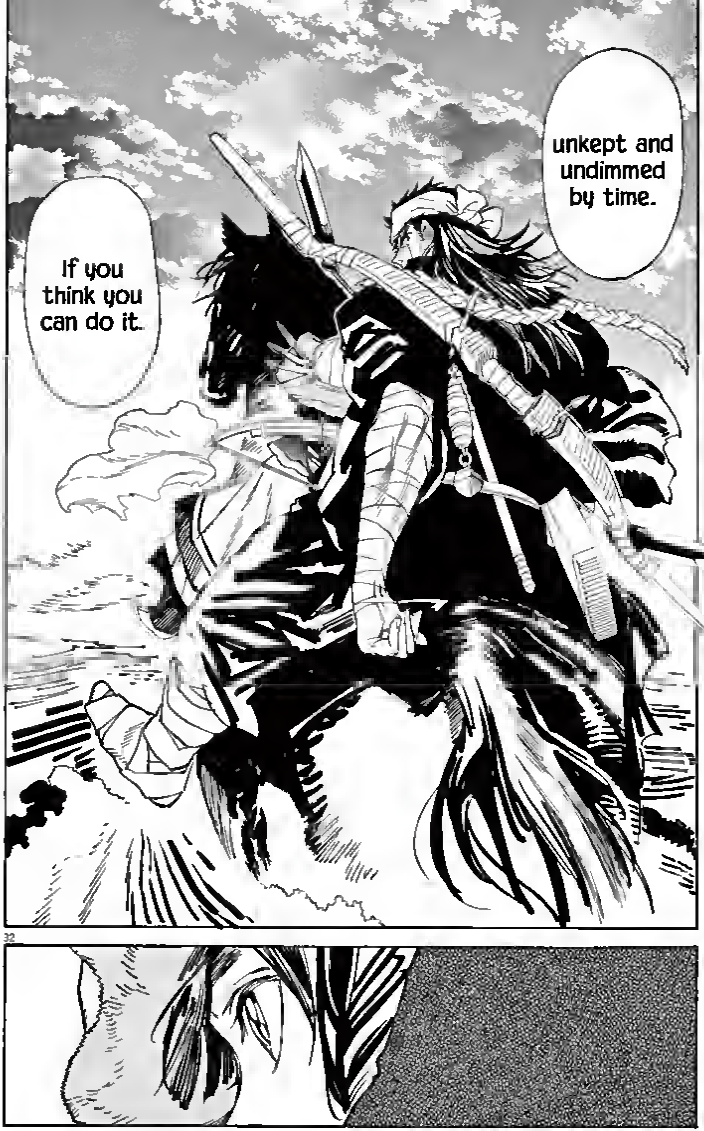
ドゴォ
whimper

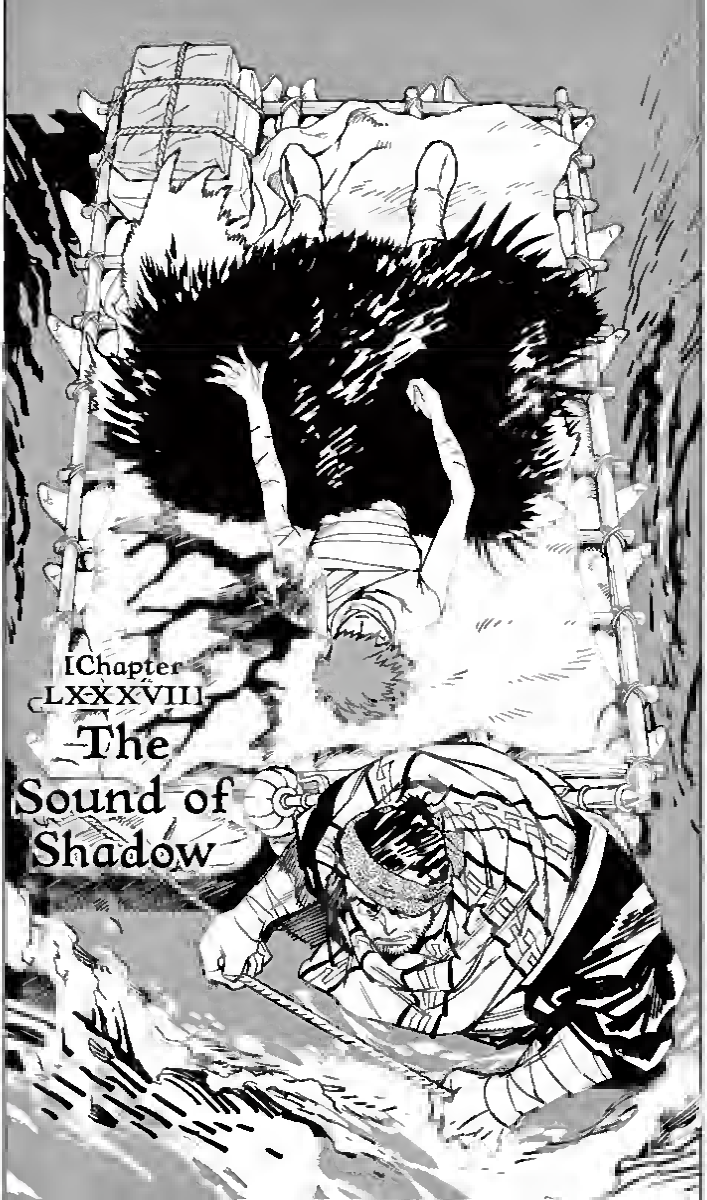
Push in. Go! Go!
We can float through there.
Their horses are bolting. The line's broken.

Doesn't matter. Go!
Gaji, you're pushing a dead guy.

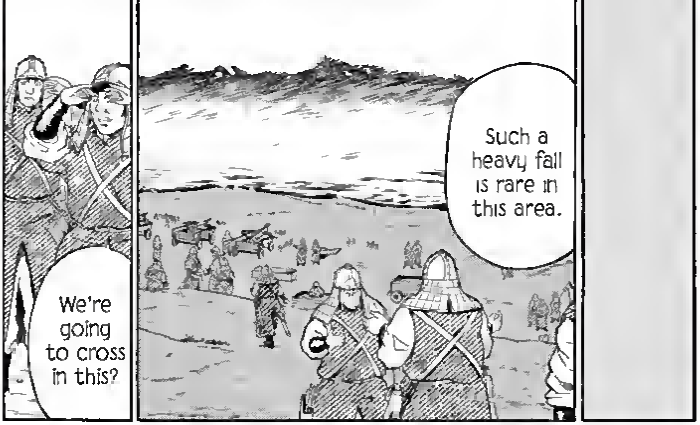
Go to a new place...!
Everyone go, alive or dead!

That's all.
You were kept, leashed, and lost.
by gun-powder, and my troops who dismount their horses and wield fire arrows.
Not many have been made yet, but one day we'll be replaced
We grow old in our roles.
...A fire arrow? ...Harabal,
we never leave our roles...
31
30
...Yes.
Come, go... You'll do as you please either way.
Your martial prowess is astounding.
With your divine archery, you have beaten the thing that easily slew your former men...
...So, proud tiger.
be selfish to the end,
Harabal,
selfish?
Am I
66


unkept and undimmed by time.
If you think you can do it.


Chapter
LXXXVIII
The
Sound of
Shadow

Let's go.
Tolui wasn't here.


We're going to cross in this?
Such a heavy fall is rare in this area.

It is no longer necessary to cross the river and exterminate them.

Apparently the chain of heavy cavalry you placed downstream slew nearly all of them.
As Your Highness predicted, the remaining Tangut attempted to escape last night by mingling with the corpses.

the Tangut bandits are no more.
In the end, they destroyed themselves.
Even those who slipped through appear to have frozen to death in the current.
If we add the corpses they floated downriver earlier,
They only just returned.
I want a direct report from the heavy cavalry.
I've heard the scouts' conclusions.
4
Work to pull them free is still ongoing.
They were attacked after completing their task, and many horses fell into the river. Some of the men are frostbitten.
Who ...?
No, I can guess.

...God's Arrow Harabal.
Your high-ness!
The prisoners have arrived.

They're late.
We rushed them, but the snow slowed our march.
I summoned prisoners from Western Xia as the best troops to undermine the morale of Tangut bandits from Zhongzhou.
It's too late now that the bandits have destroyed themselves.
Still, they're hardly worth the provisions it will cost to bring them back with us.
Oh, this is perfect.
Cross the river and search for survivors.

...This river...?
Please, let us rest. Even just a little.
Some of us can't walk another step.
What good friends.

Can all of you walk now?

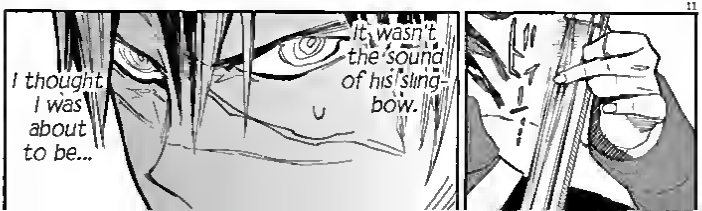
You may rest once you've made it back.
If they do not return, those who remain will die.
Only the healthy need cross.

10

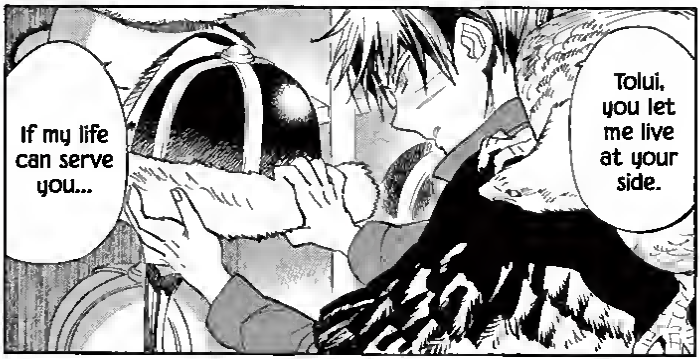
That will be the evil spirit that haunts you people of Western Xia.
If a woman is hiding with her head intact, make her a corpse.
If there is a headless woman's corpse, bring it back

...Shut Hell must have escaped.
She promised to survive...

It seems that the tiger we discussed
had two hearts after all.


I thought I was about to be...
It wasn't the sound of his sling-bow.

It must be me that brings the Mongol-hating Harabal to these parts.


Tolui, you let me live at your side.
If my life can serve you...

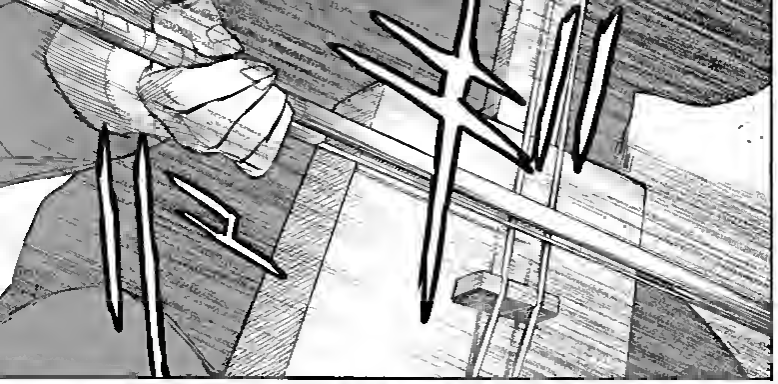
12

Well made.
A copy of my helmet. When did he...?

I can be your shadow, your shield.
...The tiger's two hearts and Shut Hell's two heads. Both are all-too-obvious lies, but I won't kill you now.
Killing my own shadow once was enough.
But neither will I trust you.

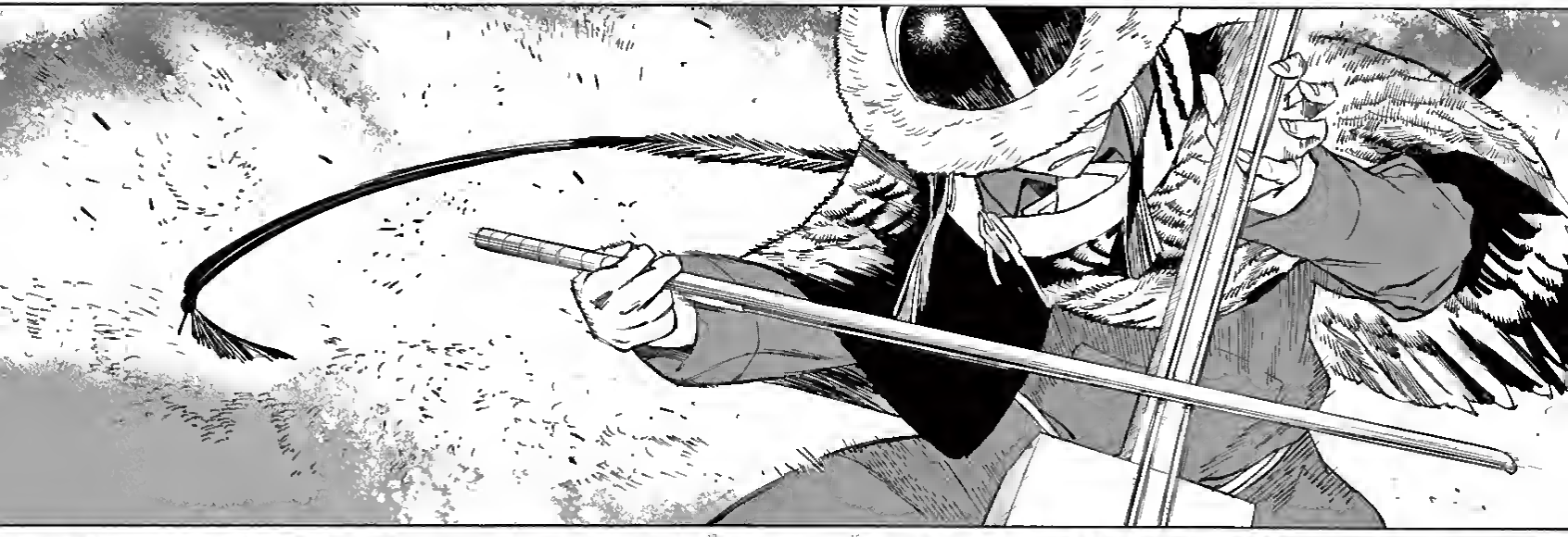
It's your wish that you serve and sacrifice for; not me.
You don't serve a nation, a people, or a king. You don't even serve yourself.
My wish is for your Mongols who will one day come.
14
I'm shaken.
...I almost believe he means it.
You are the future.

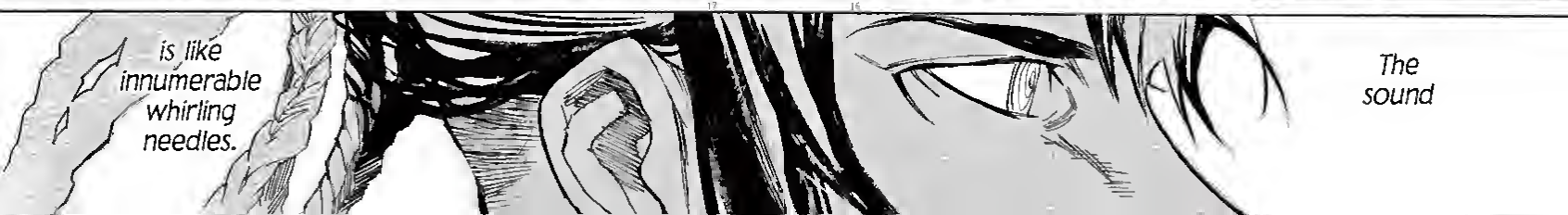
If he seeks to harm your Mongols...
So many lives and promises. Shut Heli's and my promise.
If you try to hurl them into a puddle of blood from the past for revenge...
If he seeks to harm the future of the Tangut script...
which should live among them...
...Broth-er.
The ghost of the Tsog
should perish.



This was yours.

It is not yet time to grasp your sword.




is like innumerable whirling needles.
The sound

Yurul.
Why won't the bleeding stop? It's just a scratch.
Why ...?
Shut Hell...!
Gaj! Didn't you go? Where is everyone?
That was Yurul's sound.
I could hear him
Did it work?
I retied your bandages, but you keep bleeding, no matter
Everybody... floated downriver. They must be on some bank by now.
Let's go.
I can't get up anymore Don't force yourself
I can't hear you.

F-friends...?
A wo-man...
So, you're... Shut Hell...?
Die for us.

Frozen tears...
It's to save all of us. Please, just die.
You're the bandit who pissed off the Mongols, right?
20
What are you saying...?
Move. We just need the woman...!
Even you can't kill a friend, can you?
...I can hear him. The sound is sharp.
Are you angry, Yurui...?

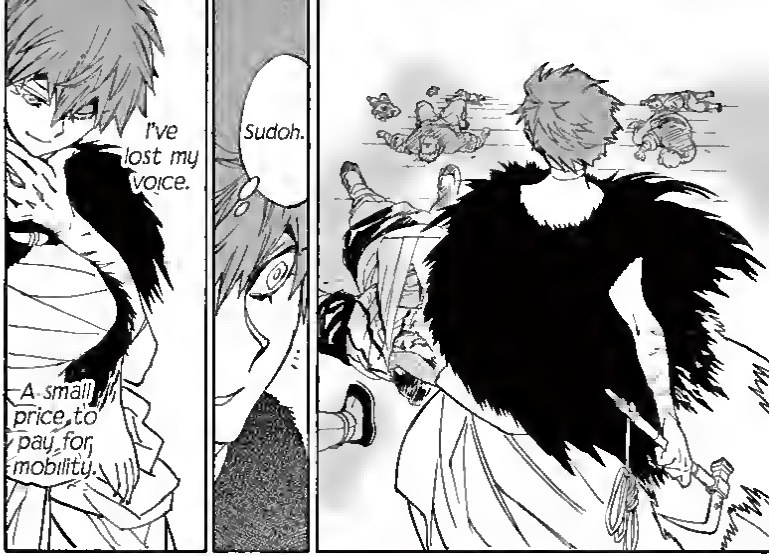
CAW
He's your hawk. He'll be back soon.
Yes.
Lashed by the broken string, I see.

Visibility is poor.
Even Harabal will have to get close if he wants to make certain.
He'll be off his guard. Then, I'll have him.
If the head he goes for is a fake... If it's a face he recognizes...
Although Yurul's death will be... somewhat regrettable.

...Svdoh.
I can move... He must still be here.
We'll... we'll make it painless.
Haa.
Ha...
Don't dodge.
Why, Yurul?
Why play like you're shouting? So hard you break a string?
Stop ...!
Stop... I'm a friend.
He's in danger.

SUDOH
I need
all your life.
Stand. Run. To get near Yurui one last time...

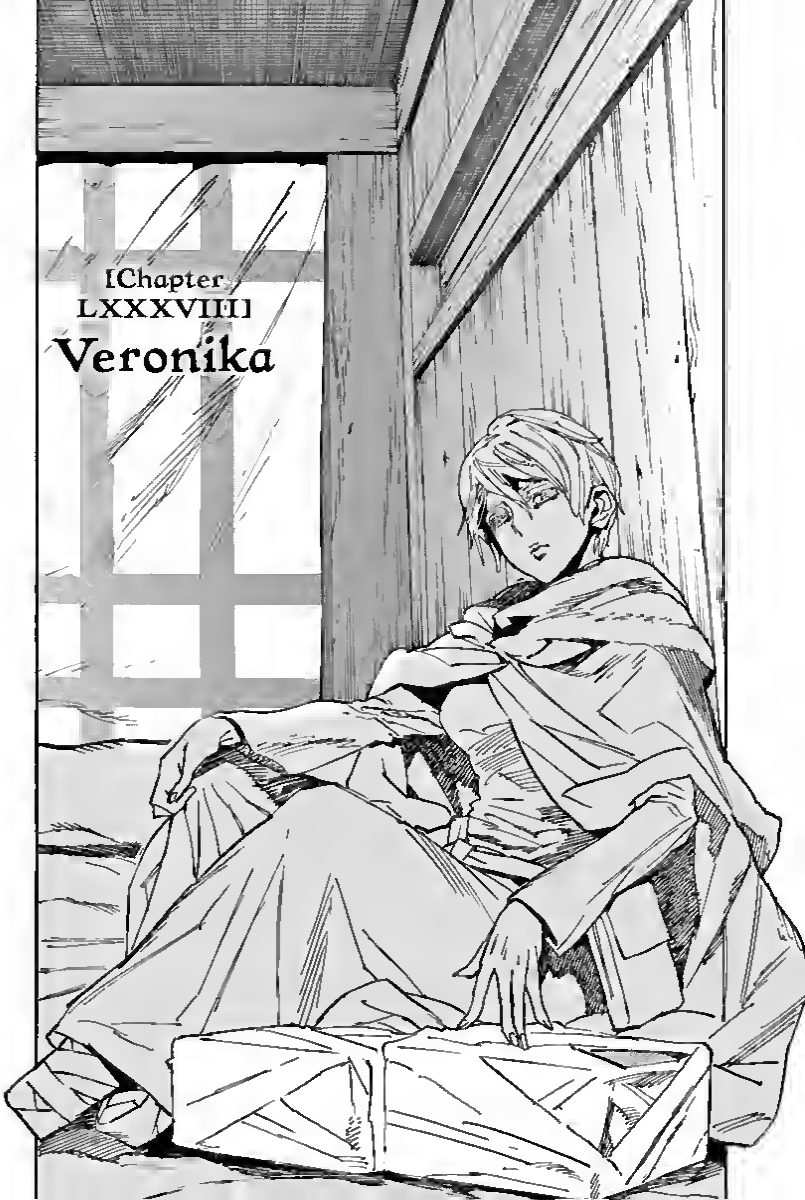
ボト


I've lost my voice.
Sudoh.
A small price to pay for mobility.

...Do you...
You didn't hesitate to kill them?
Do you mean to say you have no comrades...?

Shut Hell...!
Shut Hell!
...Please, don't die...
If you can wave...
Say something.
If you can wave like your arm's about to come off, then.

32


[Chapter LXXXVIII]
Veronika

Crown Prince Tolui's life.
The woman and the Voice of Jade in that cage.
We're taking both.

ヤバい
ドゴ！
……

What are you after, Shut Hell?
Stop.
.....
That's Yurul.
It's too late for mercy.

I can hear him.
Two pairs of ears are picking up only his sound.
Down to his breath.
Down to the sound when he blinks.
Down to his dear heart-beat.
Anything, as long as it's his.
Right now,

Clear and sharp, overlapping and filling
It feels nice.
I'm twice as strong. Soon ten times.
I don't know if my body is Sudoh's or Shut Hell's.
...But it won't last long.
Her incoherent movements, the weight of each strike..
It's like fighting two people.

It's not enough.
...I told you I'd have no mercy.

...Shut Hell,
I slashed her wind-pipe.
how long have you been dead?
Her blood ran dry a long time ago.

ギー

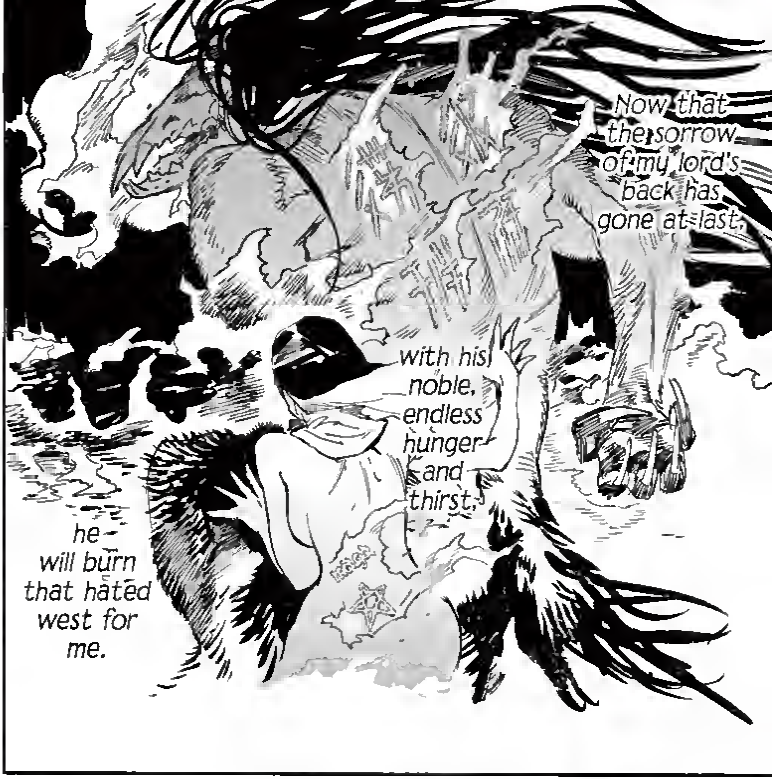
Whoomp
Stray dog...!

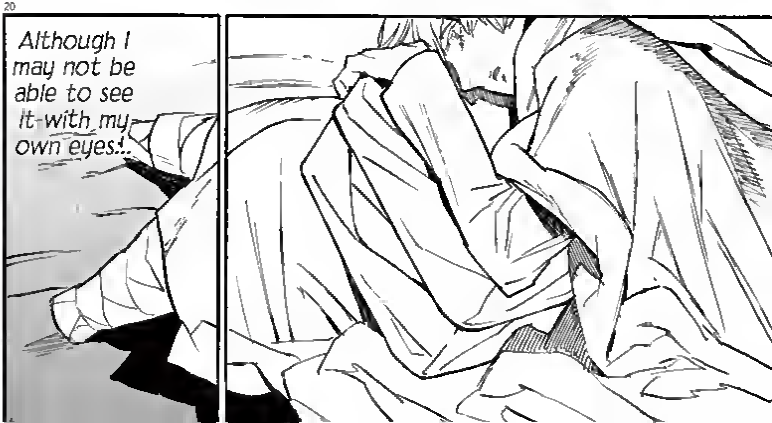
If you... get in my way...!

Yurul will be my shadow, but there's nothing to fear
His back is scarred as well. He can't do anything drastic.
...Lord Yolu.
The Mongol's will never make him Khan. Not with those wounds of shame, that curse of letters. "Slave of Western Xia."
だから あなた は
兄上
Father, the Great Khan, bears the same scars on his body.
Do you not intend to give the Voice of Jade
to the Great Khan?

They are all here.
The Voice of Jade. The nine slabs I've pursued so long.
Whatever burns are on his back, they will no longer be wounds on his Khanship.
If they are smashed at his hands, the writing of Western Xia will go the way of Western Xia itself.
If he uses the Khan's wounds to hasten his succession...
If Crown Prince Tolui does not intend to give the Voice of Jade to my lord, the Great Khan...
And yet.

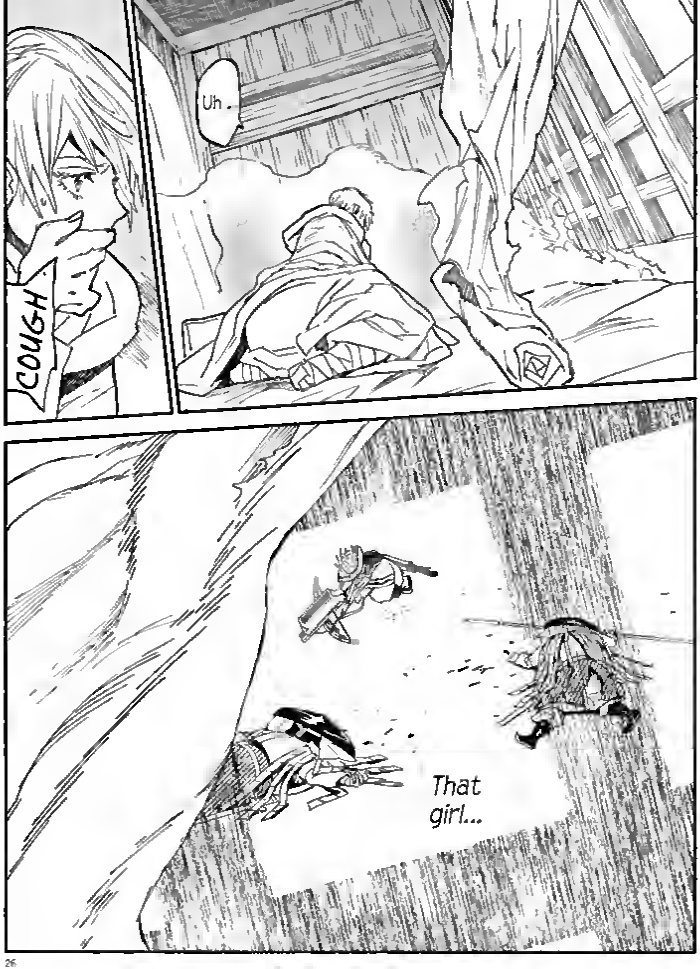
My Presbyter Johannes...
At last.
...I've been burned.
I almost forgot, almost loved. I was punished and imprisoned.
I loved and was robbed of love.
I was raped and burned. I killed and fled.
I've killed and burned, burned, burned.
...Lord Tolui lacks the burn scars that bind me to my lord.
His Mongols will not go west with conquest and fire.


Now that the sorrow of my lord's back has gone at last,
with his noble, endless hunger and thirst,
he will burn that hated west for me.

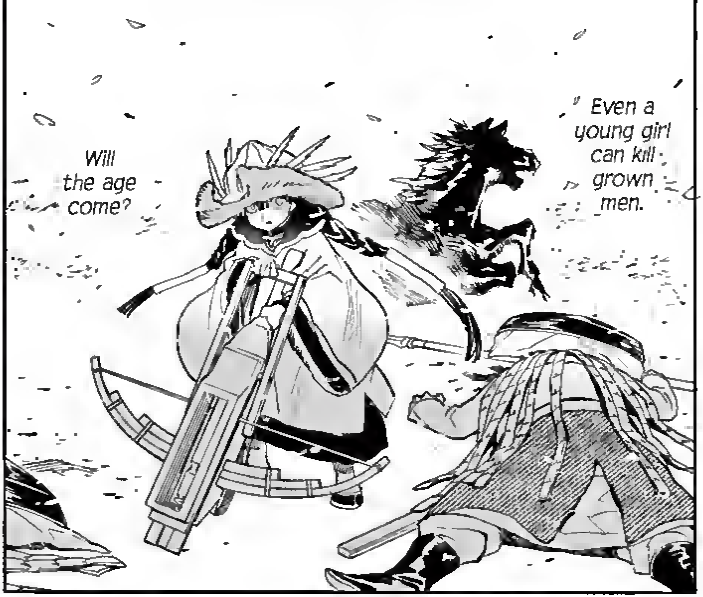

Although I may not be able to see it with my own eyes...

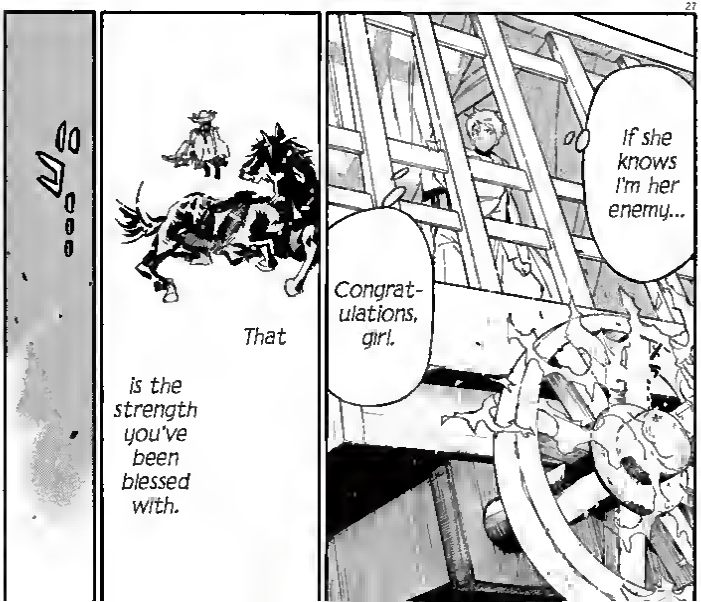
if I end up strangled in this cage in exchange.
It doesn't matter
The instant he closes his eyes, relaxes and shows me the nape of his neck.
I always have the opportunity
I must do.
In which case, there's only one thing...

ズゴゴゴ
ズゴゴゴ
ズゴゴゴ


Uh.
COUGH!
That girl...

Where did she get that?
...This is the power of fire arrows.


Will the age come?
Even a young girl can kill grown men.


If she knows I'm her enemy...
Congrat-ulations, girl.
That is the strength you've been blessed with.

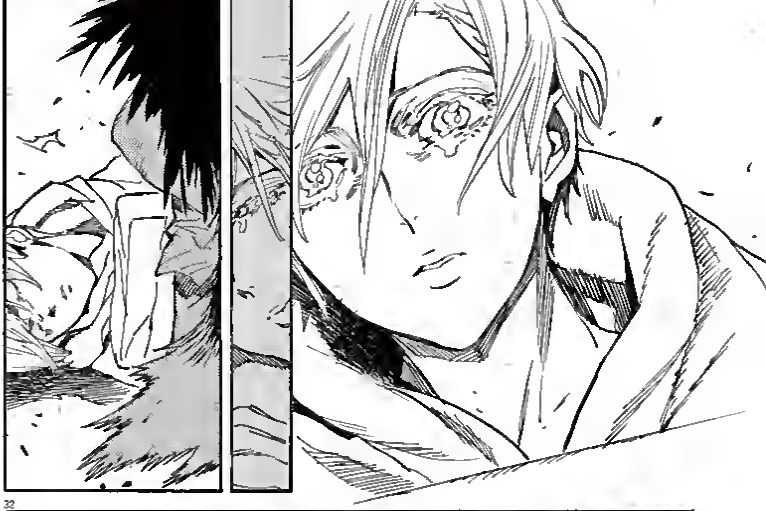
How like me.
COUGH
Burning to death along with my cage...
COUGH

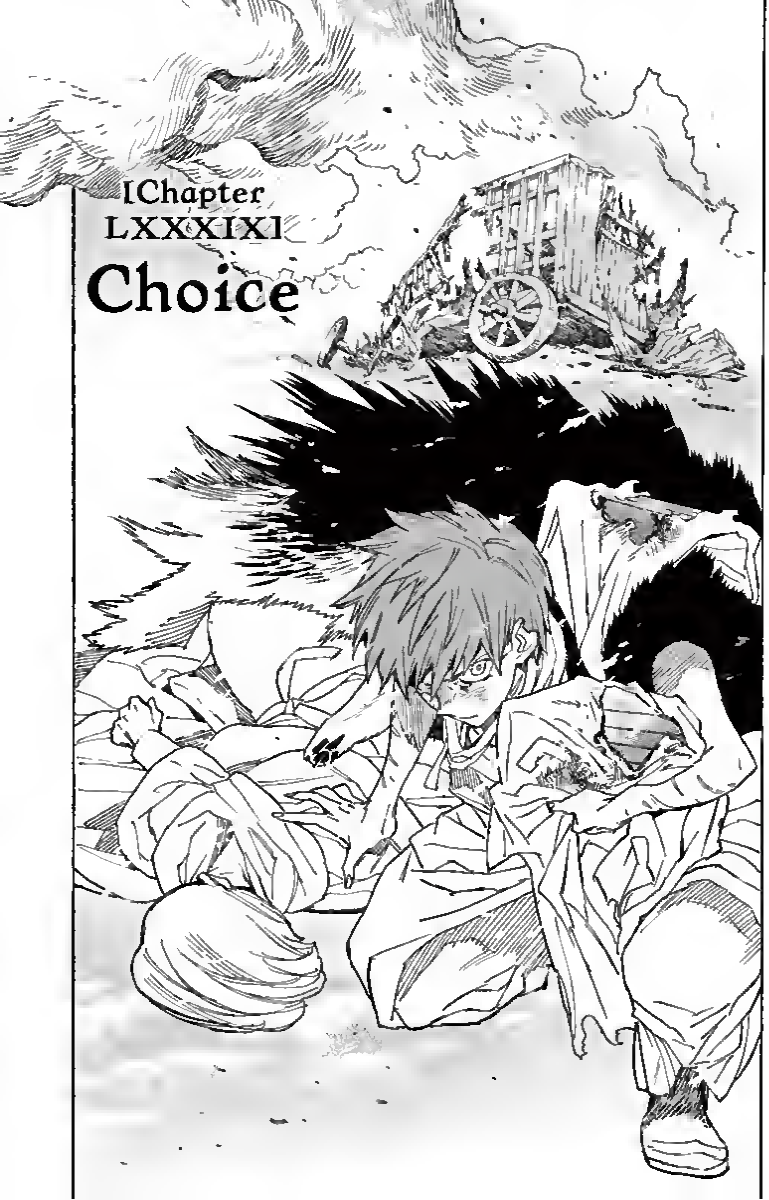
Haa
COUGH
COUGH
...I'd been hoping to die painlessly.
Beheaded or strangled.

Haa
COUGH
COUGH
Haa
Haa

Sha-
kira.
I'm going
there the
same way
you did.

CRACK
CRACK
CRACK
CRACK



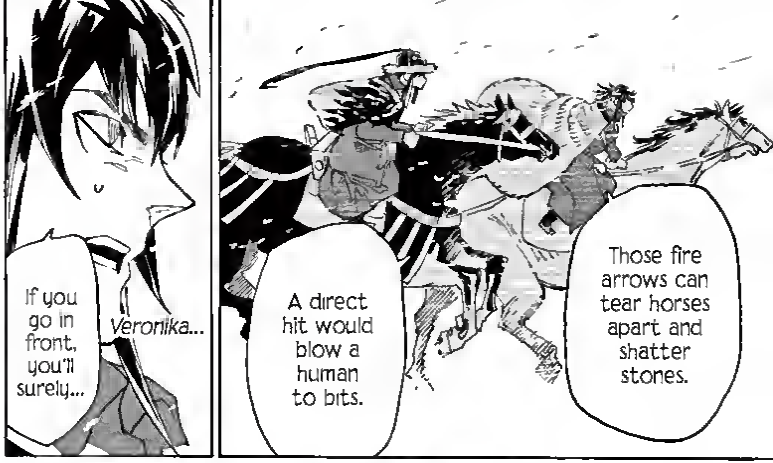

[Chapter LXXXIX]
Choice

ザッザッ
2
Damn, snow's making it hard to see...
The noise is over there.
ヒソ
ヒソ
I'm surprised they still have the willpower to stare ahead.

That's fine by me.
She managed to escape to the camp with the Voice of Jade.
The cart burned, but the woman's body wasn't there.

They're close.
Are the Voice of Jade and Veronika safe...?
Harabal.
I was sure you'd come for Tolui for me.
before you caused a disturbance.

A white cloak!
Nalan.
Please wait, Tolui.
We're in disguise. Let me, your shadow, ride ahead.
Veronika...!


If you go in front, you'll surely...
Veronika...
A direct hit would blow a human to bits.
Those fire arrows can tear horses apart and shatter stones.

Why can't you be more cowardly?
If I'm your shadow, put me in front. Make me your shield.
So that we can hunt tigers together.

So long as I lie and your shot is swift.
I will not die.
Although it is true that I've come to value your life.
Together, is it?
...Either way, one human body won't be much of a shield against fire arrows.
That's right. I promised to live a long time.
To Boldu, to the Tangut script...
And to Shut Hell.
I believe in you.

...I do.
Do you believe that?
Once I've bagged a tiger, I will not fail to protect the writing of Western Xia.
ドド
ドド
ドド

...He's here.
That's our last fire arrow.
If you want to kill him with your own hands, don't fire until I give the word.

ピュー
ピュー

I knew it.
So, it was you the letters blessed.
Vengeance is over.

Even if you try
to bless them by throwing your life away like this.
!
He knew it was me all along...?!
"Yurui." "Bless-ing"...

Over there.
Fire.
No.
Tolui...!

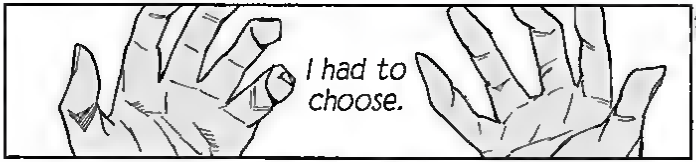
Lord Nalan.
A ghost...

Ngh.
Kii
!
Boom

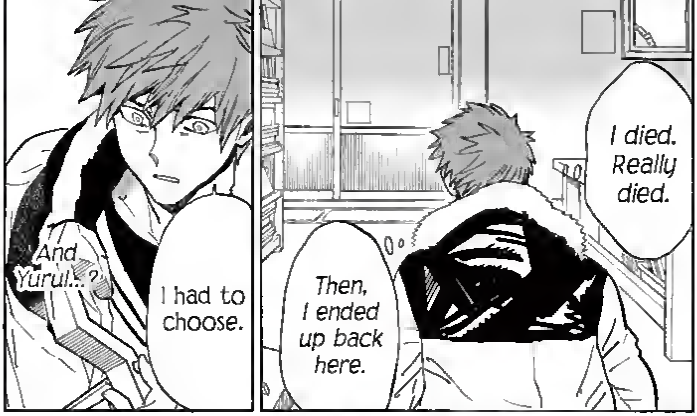
Shut
Hell...

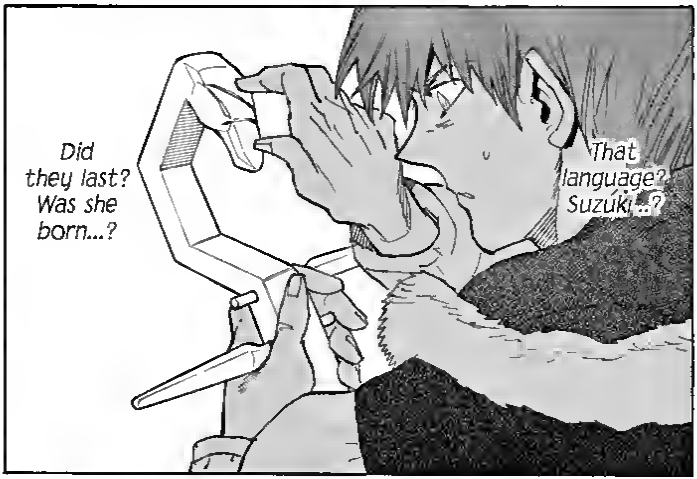
AAAA

Yu...


I had to choose.

Yurui.
The writing or you.


I died. Really died.
Then, I ended up back here.
I had to choose.
And Yuru!...?


That language? Suzuki...?
Did they last? Was she born...?

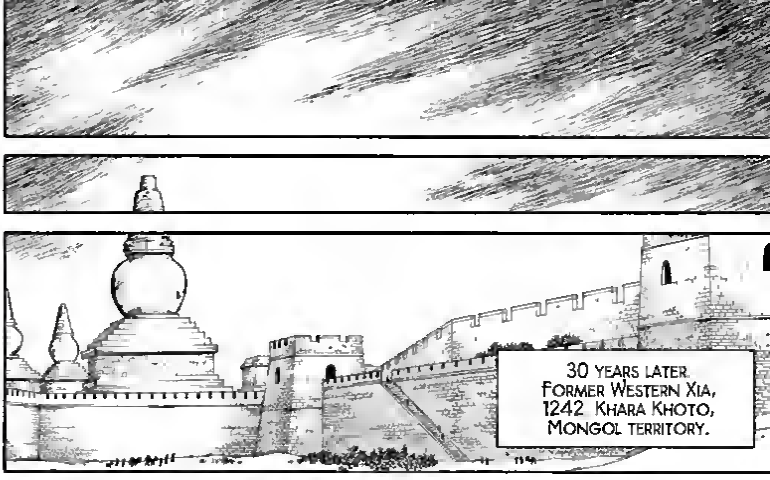
[Final Chapter] Seeds

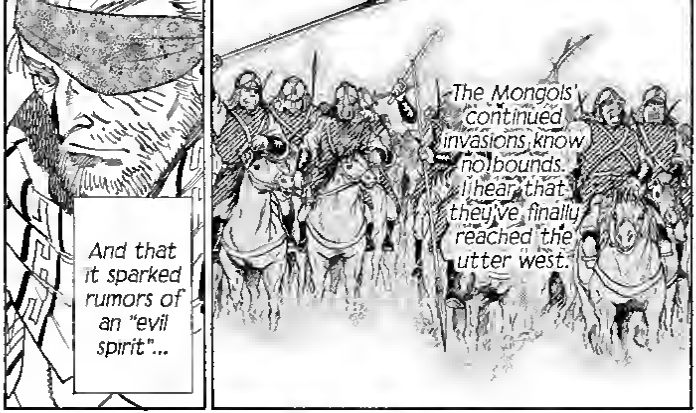
We don't matter. But isn't this practically ...
Even if it's enough to blow both of us away, this might be able to stop it...!
Yurul will live. Even if he'll never forgive us.
his life until now, and from now on?
Yeah.
Yurul will live.

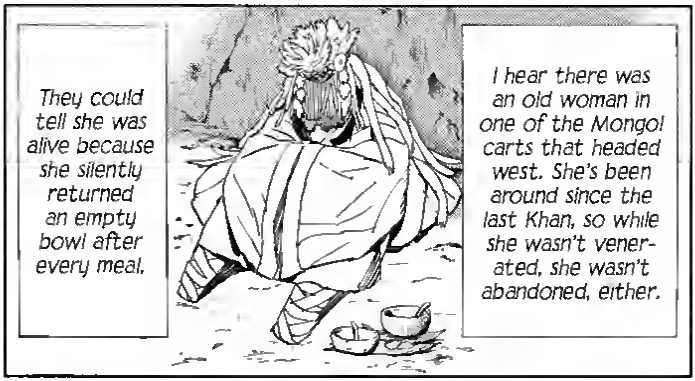
Sudoh... right?
My life isn't worth even one of these fragments.
Saved by selfish affection.
For it, you traded an irreplaceable thing and...
an irreplaceable... person...
Shut Hell
"Slave of Western Xia."
I thought to see how you would live with the scars on your back,
but the marks on our backs no longer bear any meaning.

I need a "Tolui."
Come.
hm...
There's no one to take his place.
Even he's gone now.

If you know that all the people who allowed you to live are irreplaceable, then you cannot die.
Not for a long time.


30 YEARS LATER.
FORMER WESTERN XIA,
1242 KHARA KHOTO,
MONGOL TERRITORY.
What I write now is the memorandum of an old man.
. . .15 years after the end of Western Xia, this city hasn't changed.
Trade continues under the Mongols. People, goods and rumors come and go from east and west.
After all, I've decided to write for myself.
Or so I say, but I'm not above mixing in uncertain rumors and feelings.


And that it sparked rumors of an "evil spirit"...
The Mongols' continued invasions know no bounds. I hear that they've finally reached the utter west.

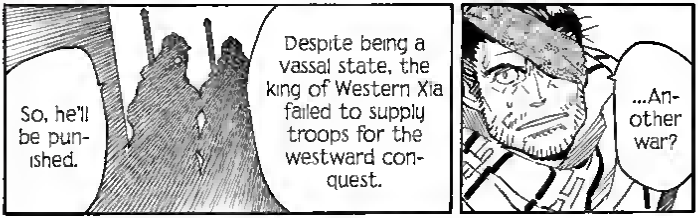

They could tell she was alive because she silently returned an empty bowl after every meal.
I hear there was an old woman in one of the Mongol carts that headed west. She's been around since the last Khan, so while she wasn't venerated, she wasn't abandoned, either.

Habt ihr gesehen...!?
[Do you see...?]

Habt ihr gesehen?! (Do you see?!!
Habt ihr gesehen?! Presbyter Johannes kam mit dem Volk von Tartarus! (Do you see?) Presbyter Johannes has come with the people of Hell!!
Not even the old woman's long-time caretakers understood her words, but they were apparently in the same tongue as the foe's.
...Mein... (...My...)
Habt ihr gesehen... mein Heimat...? (Do you see... my home...?)
I saw an evil spirit once myself, a long time ago...
What happened to the old lady? Who knows; it's just a rumor.
And so, it became a rumor on the other side that an "evil spirit" had come, bringing warriors from Hell.

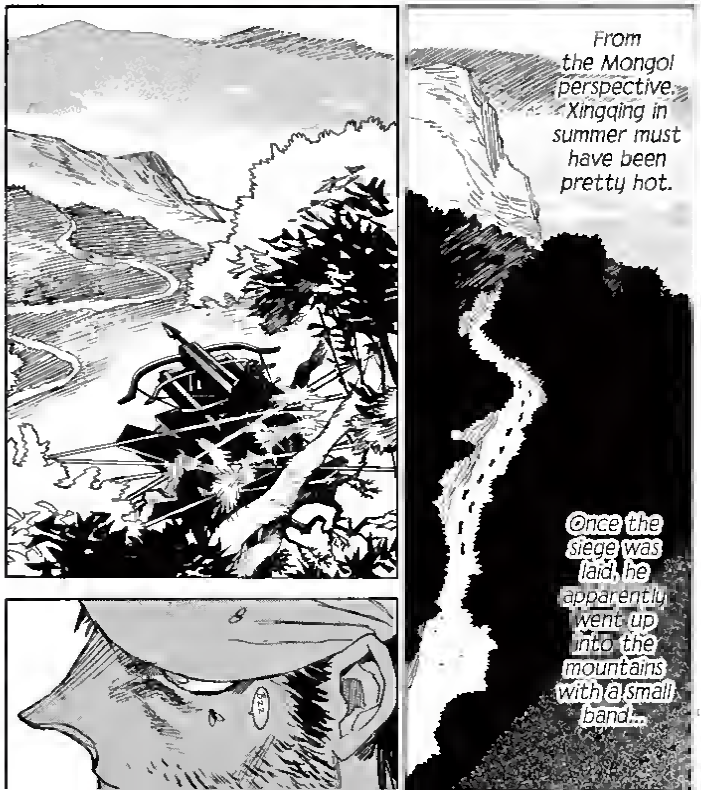
1214
Doesn't look like I can write about you yet.
There was a not in with the copies.
Said that he loved you.
And here that's what I wanted to write.
..."Shut Hell."
1216
1219
1224

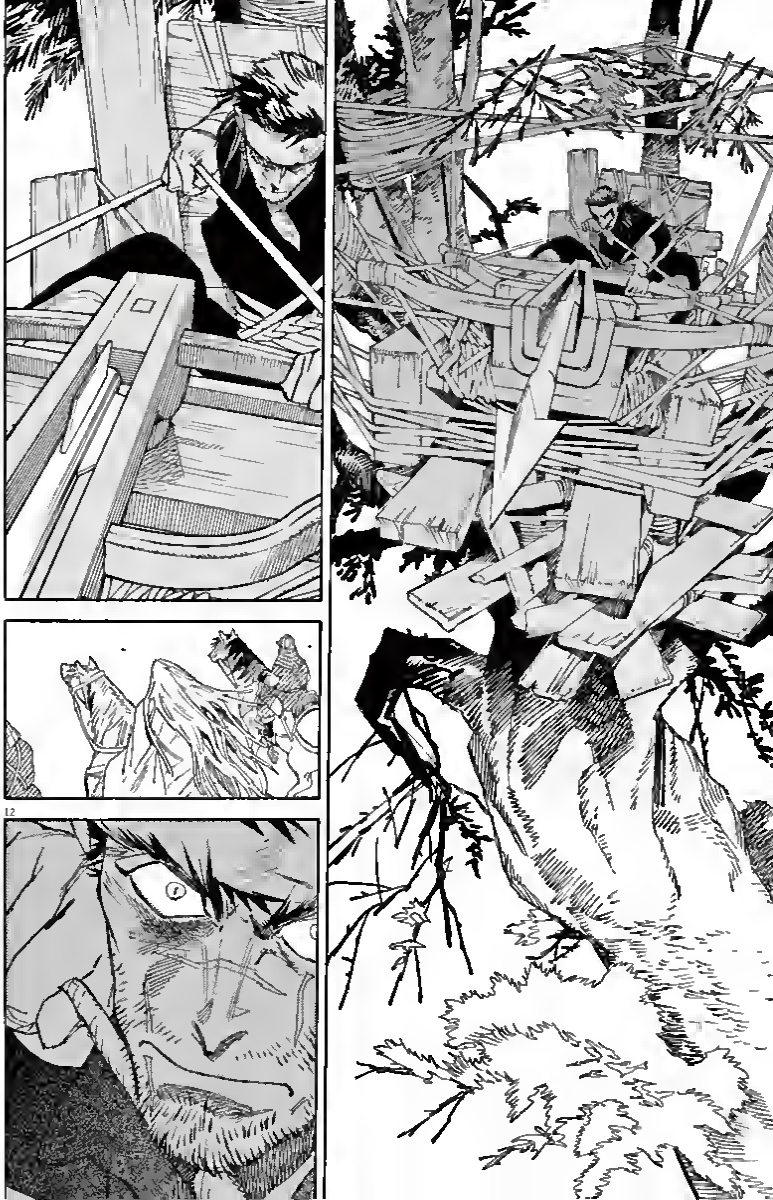
Even as a laborer, he'd just drop his load.
What, a one-eye?
1226


So, he'll be punished.
Despite being a vassal state, the king of Western Xia failed to supply troops for the westward conquest.
...Another war?

...Yeah. Oh, Gaji, on top of that. .
It's fine. Not like the king ever did anything for us.
1227
Looks like our country's finally gone.
The capital at Xingqing has fallen. This time they killed the king too.

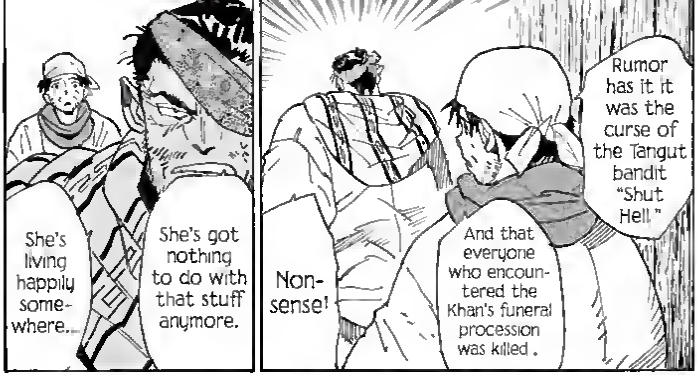
They say the Great Khan of the Mongols died too...

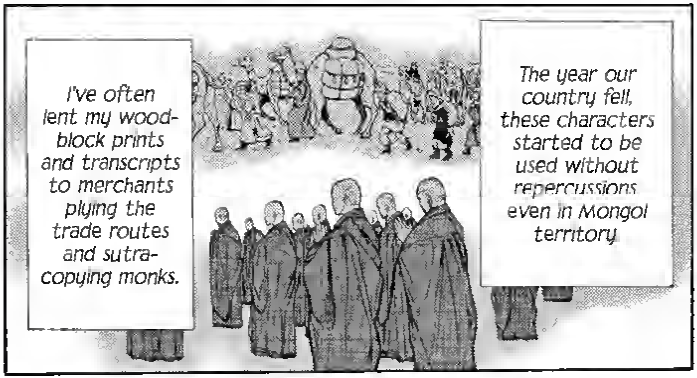

From the Mongol perspective, Xingqing in summer must have been pretty hot.
Once the siege was laid, he apparently went up into the mountains with a small band...
ｽﾔｽﾔ

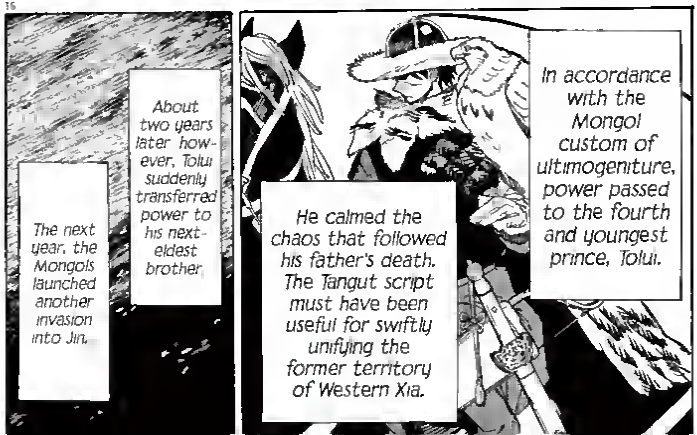


Oh yes; that tiger sprung from the loins of the Tangut woman.

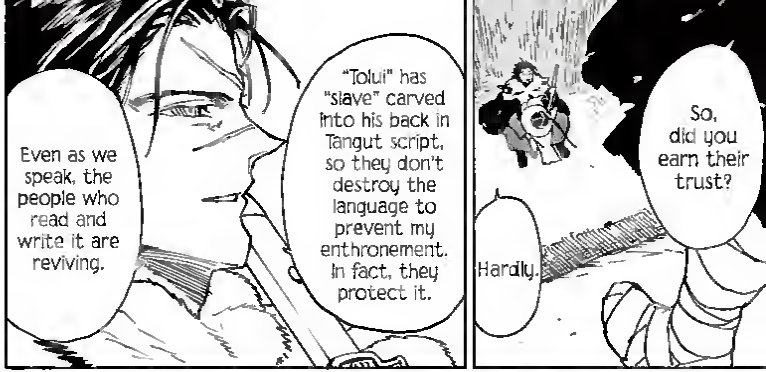
So, I've been bitten.
.....
15
14


She's living happily somewhere...
She's got nothing to do with that stuff anymore.
Nonsense!
And that everyone who encountered the Khan's funeral procession was killed.
Rumor has it it was the curse of the Tangut bandit "Shut Hell."


I've often lent my woodblock prints and transcripts to merchants plying the trade routes and sutra-copying monks.
The year our country fell, these characters started to be used without repercussions even in Mongol territory


The next year, the Mongols launched another invasion into Jin.
About two years later however, Tolui suddenly transferred power to his next-eldest brother.
He calmed the chaos that followed his father's death. The Tangut script must have been useful for swiftly unifying the former territory of Western Xia.
In accordance with the Mongol custom of ultimogeniture, power passed to the fourth and youngest prince, Tolui.

1232, SOUTHWEST OF THE NEW JIN CAPITAL, KAIFENG. IN THE MONGOL TRENCHES.
You're the fourth prince, and you're on the front lines?
17
Ceding power because you weren't fit to be the Great Khan..
Did you show your "brothers" the scars on your back,
I have to keep earning trust.
It's been a long time since anyone called me that name.
Harabal.
...Yurui?
Prove I'm a useful dog.


Even as we speak, the people who read and write it are reviving.
"Tolui" has "slave" carved into his back in Tangut script, so they don't destroy the language to prevent my enthronement. In fact, they protect it.
So, did you earn their trust?
Hardly.

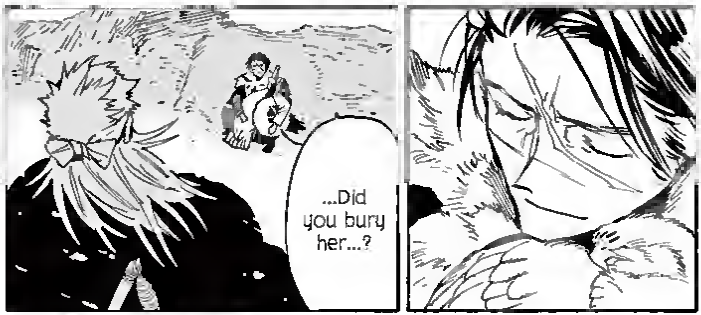
You love writing and claim that you can use it to preserve people, but you won't try to preserve yourself?
Your true name will not be recorded in the Mongol histories.

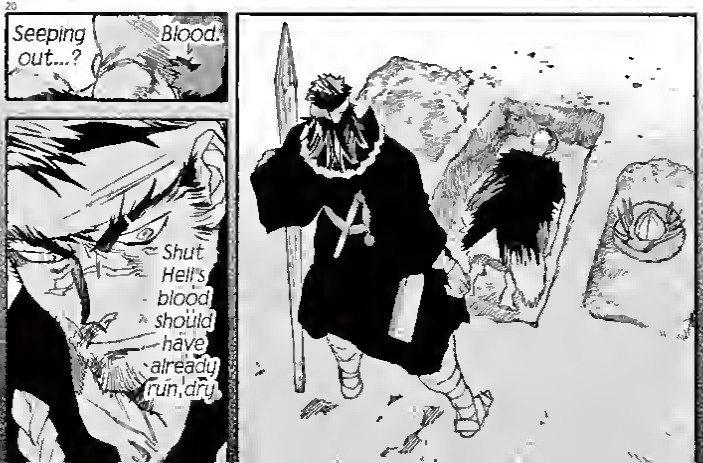
Whether I was named "blessing," or mocked for my pretensions to kingship, or branded a slave,
I was just me.
It doesn't matter who I was.

It was meetings and wishes that made me.
It doesn't matter how the names and wounds I've been given are or aren't recorded.

..You mean that your wish to preserve writing made you and kept you alive.
Come to think of it, you said back then that I'd been blessed by writing.

Shut Hell's writing.
It was writing that told me that it was you dressed as Tolui.

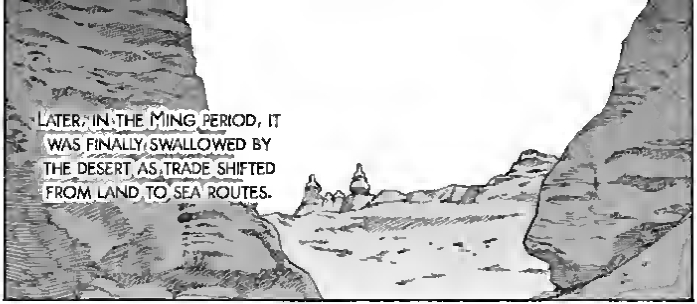

...Did you bury her...?


Seeping out...?
Blood.
Shut Hell's blood should have already run dry.

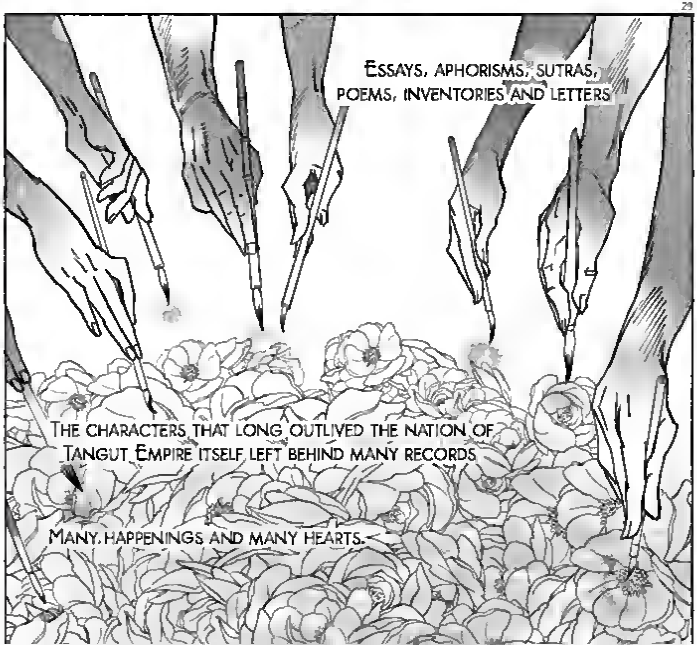
...A beat.
At the same time, little by little, her wounds slowly closed.
slowly, so slowly it seemed to be stopped, a little of her blood returned.
...After that,
If the blood had come back before the wounds closed, it would have spilled out.
It was like someone slowly gave her life.
Like someone slowly retreated from an invalid's bedside.

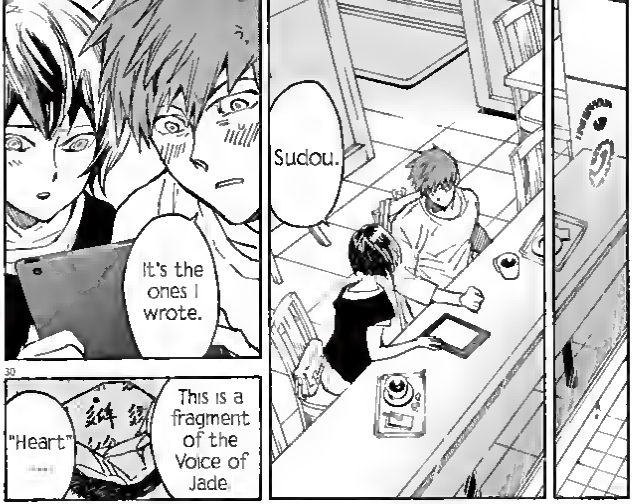
Su-
zuki.
I've
wanted to
see you for
so long...
For a
really long
time...
Sudou.

and I heard rumors of "Shut Hell" again.
The Mongol's undaunted in the east, went ever westward..
Jin collapsed soon after the fall of its new capital, Kaifeng.
I guess she's alive.
I want to see you,
...Shut Hell.
KHARA KHOTO FLOURISHED THROUGH THE MONGOL – THE YUAN – PERIOD AS A KEY TRADE AND MILITARY CENTER.


LATER, IN THE MING PERIOD, IT WAS FINALLY SWALLOWED BY THE DESERT AS TRADE SHIFTED FROM LAND TO SEA ROUTES.

AS THE TRADE ROUTES WITHERED, EXAMPLES OF TANGUT SCRIPT DRAMATICALLY DECLINED, FINALLY COMING TO AN END IN THE LATE MING.


ESSAYS, APHORISMS, SUTRAS, POEMS, INVENTORIES AND LETTERS
THE CHARACTERS THAT LONG OUTLIVED THE NATION OF TANGUT EMPIRE ITSELF LEFT BEHIND MANY RECORDS.
MANY HAPPENINGS AND MANY HEARTS.



"We managed to see each other again, didn't we, Sudoh?"

Characters don't speak just because they were written.
Although I resented it at first
Now I understand why you kept me alive.
the happenings and hearts come back to life. Any number of times.
People touch them, and then...
"And so,"

writing
is always
waiting
quietly for
people.

THE END

【手伝ってくれた人々】
井口文枝
大川亜由美
椿 克彦
前嶋重機
松山由希
渡邉忠司

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毛利英介(関西大学東西学術研究所非常勤研究員)

【装 幀】
幸橋淳二

[ed.] Writing cannot explain itself

When it meets people, events and hearts return again and again

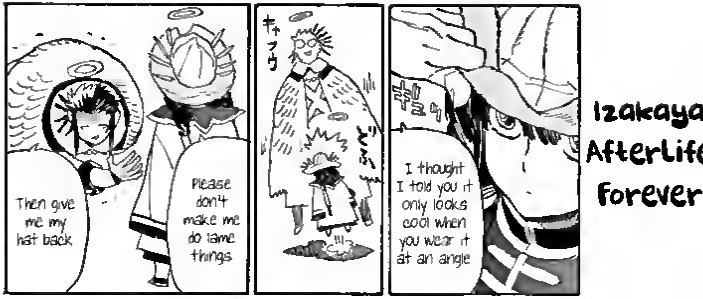
Therefore, writing always silently longs to meet people

Sudoh, we saw each other again, didn't we?
At first, I resented you.
Now I understand why you kept me alive.
Written words can't speak on their own.
When they meet people, the happenings and hearts
come back any number of times.
And so, writing is always quietly yearning to meet people.

Yuruli's final letter/Tangut translation (latter half) by Arakawa Shintarou and Japanese draft

Man, you keep faking like you're dying, then finally come back to life.
I'm leaving. You going to look for Yurui again once you can stand?
I'd toss you out if you weren't the last connection I've got left
-Your voice still gone?
-Why tell me that?
'I want gyoza.'
Guess it's a good thing we have writing.
"I want ramen"-?
Why tell me that?

Illustration/Maeshima Shigeki


Then give me my hat back.
Please don't make me do lame things.
キュウ
I thought I told you it only looks cool when you wear it at an angle.

You're such a child, Melumi. You came here way too soon.
What are you crying for?
NO

Welcome!
I'm scared! He's scary!
It's too soon! Too soon, Toui!
Keep your snot off me.
Enough bullying, Nalan
Toiu-oof!

Is this better?
Yum!
scary?
I hear you looked after Veronika for a long time
-When will that girl get here?
Must be tough
In about 5 more years
Just wait a little longer

She's here

Thank you for reading

Itou Yuu

シュトヘル14

ビッグ スピリッツ コミックス スペシャル

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